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*Mary Jane Thompson*

# THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES.

*RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE.*

BY  
W.M. CUDWORTH, M. INST. C.E.

Darlington :  
WILLIAM DRESSER, PRINTER.  
1888.

*Not Published.*



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THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES.



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## A L C E S T I S.

APOLLO.

O, dwelling of Admetus, where I bore  
A menial's lot, although I am a god !  
Zeus was the cause, who having slain my son  
Asklepius, hurling lightning at his breast,  
I was enraged, and slew the Cyclopes,  
The forgers of the awful fire of Zeus.  
For this the father forced me to atone,  
And serve a mortal man in menial guise.  
And coming to this land, I watched the herds  
For him who entertained me, and preserved  
His house unto this day ; and being myself  
Pious, I chanced to find a pious man,  
The son of Pheres, whom I saved from death,  
The fates beguiling. And the goddesses  
Granted me that Admetus should escape  
The death impending, giving in exchange  
Another victim to the powers beneath.

And when he'd proved, and gone through all his friends,  
His aged sire, and her who gave him birth,  
He found not anyone except his wife  
Willing to die for him, and see no more  
The light of day. Who now within the house  
Is lying in his arms, and gasping out  
Her soul ; for on this day, it is decreed  
That she must die, and pass away from life.  
And lest pollution find me in this house  
I leave the roof of this beloved abode.  
Already do I see stern Death at hand,  
Priest of the dying, who will presently  
Lead her below to Hades' dark abodes.  
And at the fated time he shows himself,  
Watching for this sad day wherein 'twas fixed  
That she must die.

#### DEATH.

Ah ! art thou here ? What doest thou in these halls ?  
Why, Phœbus, dost thou linger in this place ?  
Again thou dost me wrong by bearing off,  
And making cease the rights and honours due  
To the great powers below. Was't not enough  
To thwart me in Admetus' day of doom,  
Frustrating by thy craft the destinies ?  
And now again, thou art watching over her  
With bow in hand, who for her husband's life  
Promised herself to die, the daughter fair  
Of Pelias.

APOLLO.

Fear not, I have justice both  
And solid reasons.

DEATH.

What need then for bow  
If thou hast justice ?

APOLLO.

'Tis my usual way  
To bear it with me.

DEATH.

Aye, and beyond right  
To benefit this house.

APOLLO.

For I do grieve  
For the misfortunes of the man I love.

DEATH.

And wilt thou rob me of this second corpse ?

APOLLO.

Nay, I did not take e'en the former one  
By force.

DEATH.

How then is he upon the earth,  
And not below the ground ?

APOLLO.

By, for himself  
Giving his wife whom now thou com'st to seek.

DEATH.

Aye, and I'll take her to the lands below.

APOLLO.

Take her and go, for 'tis not in my power  
To move thee.

DEATH.

To slay him whose hour has come,  
This is my office.

APOLLO.

Nay, but to strike down  
Those who are meet for death.

DEATH.

I understand  
Thy meaning and good wishes.

APOLLO.

Can it be  
Alcestis may arrive at good old age?

DEATH.

It cannot be, for I must also have  
My rights and honours.

APOLLO.

Surely thou'l not take  
More than one life.

DEATH.

But when the youthful die  
I have the greater honour.

APOLLO.

But if age  
Come on her ere she die, her funeral rites  
Will be the richer.

DEATH.

Phœbus, what thou says't  
Is a law for the rich.

APOLLO.

How say'st thou? Art  
Thou witty inadvertently?

DEATH.

The rich  
Would buy the privilege of dying old.

APOLLO.

Doth it not please thee then to grant to me  
This favour?

DEATH.

No, indeed, thou knowest well  
My turn of mind.

APOLLO.

Oh, yes! to mortals hateful  
And loathèd by the gods.

DEATH.

Thou cans't not have  
All things, and hast no right to.

APOLLO.

Assuredly  
Thou shalt desist, relentless though thou art.  
To Pheres' house a certain man will come  
Sent by Eurystheus from the stormy land  
Of Thrace, in quest of horses and a car,

---

Who in Admetus' hall, received as guest  
Shall rescue from thee his devoted wife  
By putting forth his might, nor shalt thou have  
Our thanks, and yet thou'l do it all the same,  
And shalt be hated by me.

DEATH

Pleading much

Thou shalt get nothing more. The woman then  
Shall go below to Hades' dwelling place.  
And now I go to her, that with my sword  
I may begin the customary rites,  
For sacred is he to the gods below  
Whose locks are severed by my fateful blade.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

What means this death-like stillness in the house ?  
Why are all silent in Admetus' hall ?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

There is no friendly voice at hand to tell  
Whether 'tis ours to mourn a queen deceased,  
Or Pelias' child, Alcestis still survives,  
And sees the light of day, to me and all  
Seeming to be the best and noblest wife  
Toward her own husband.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Heareth any one  
Groaning, or beat of hands within the house,

Or lamentation, as if all were done ?  
But not a single one of all their men  
Is standing at the gates. O, Poean, show,  
Show thyself midst our waves of misery !

## SEMI-CHORUS II.

They would not be all silent were she dead—

## SEMI-CHORUS I.

At least she is not taken from the house  
For burial.

## SEMI-CHORUS II.

Why? I do not comprehend.  
Wherfore so sure?

## SEMI-CHORUS I.

How could Admetus give  
His chaste wife burial with no one nigh?

## SEMI-CHORUS II.

Before the gates I see no lustral bowl,  
With water from the fountain, as is wont,  
When one has passed away, and no shorn lock  
Hangs in the vestibule, which ever falls  
In mourning for the dead ; no youthful hands  
Of women send forth their resounding beat.

## SEMI-CHORUS I.

And yet this is indeed the appointed day.

## SEMI-CHORUS II.

What's this thou sayest ?

## SEMI-CHORUS I.

On which it is her doom  
To go beneath the earth.

## SEMI-CHORUS II.

That touches close  
My mind and soul.

## SEMI-CHORUS I.

Aye ! when the good depart  
Grief well becomes the man of upright heart.

## CHORUS.

But there's no spot of earth where voyaging,  
Not Lycia, nor great Ammon's thirsty plains  
One might release the unhappy lady's soul  
From death's stern grasp. Untimely fate's at hand  
And at the altars of the mighty gods  
No priest have I to whom I can resort.  
If Phœbus' son were only with his eyes  
Looking upon this light, she would have come,  
Leaving the lands of darkness and the gates  
Of Hades ; for he used to raise the dead  
Before the bolt of Zeus's lightning flame  
Struck him ; but now what hope can I admit  
Of life for her ? For all has now been tried  
By princes, and the altars of the gods  
Are filled with bleeding offerings, and there is  
No help for these misfortunes. But here comes

A woman servant from the house, all tears.  
What fortune shall I hear? To mourn, indeed,  
If to our lords there happen ought of ill,  
Is to be pardoned; but we now would know  
Whether our lady yet survives, or fate  
Has overcome her.

WOMAN SERVANT.

You may speak of her  
As living and as dead.

CHORUS.

And how can one  
Both die and see the light?

WOMAN SERVANT.

This very hour  
She droops and gasps her soul out.

CHORUS.

Wretched man,  
Such as thou art, O what a wife thou'lt miss!

WOMAN SERVANT.

My master knows not yet before he's lost her.

CHORUS.

Is there no longer hope to save her life?

WOMAN SERVANT.

No, for the destined day is pressing on her.

CHORUS.

Are not the accustomed rites, then, done for her?

## WOMAN SERVANT.

The shroud is ready and her husband soon  
Will lay her in the tomb.

## CHORUS.

Now let her know  
She'll die with fair renown, the noblest wife  
By far of those who dwell beneath the sun.

## WOMAN SERVANT.

Why not the best? Can any one gainsay?  
What must the wife be who surpasses her!  
How could she reverence her husband more  
Than by the offering of her life for his?  
And this, indeed, does all the city know;  
But what she did within the palace walls  
Hearing, you'll marvel at. For when she saw  
The appointed day was come she went and bathed  
Her fair skin in pure water from the stream,  
And taking from her cedar chest her robe  
And decorations, she adorned herself  
Becomingly, and, standing at the hearth,  
She prayed, "O mistress (for I go beneath  
The earth) I fall before thee and entreat  
With latest breath, that thou wilt guard and keep  
My orphan children, and unite with one  
A loving wife, and to the other give  
A noble husband, and O let them not

Like me depart this earth before their time,  
But let them in prosperity complete  
A life of blessing in their fatherland.  
And all the altars in Admetus' house  
She crowned with garlands, offering up her prayers,  
Stripping the leaves off from the myrtle boughs,  
Without a tear or sigh, nor did the fate  
That was impending change the blooming tint  
Of her fair skin ; and rushing then within  
Her chamber to her bed, she there, indeed,  
Melted in tears, and thus bemoaned herself :—  
“ O couch, where I gave up my maidenhood  
For this man’s sake, for whom I go to die,  
Farewell, I do not hate thee, me alone  
Thou hast destroyed, declining to be false  
To thee and to my husband, now I die.  
Some other woman will possess thee soon ;  
She cannot be more chaste, but may perchance  
Have better fortune.” Throwing herself down  
She kissed, and kissed it, moistening all the bed  
With the soft flood that streamed forth from her eyes.  
And when she had found satiety of tears,  
She went forth drooping, rushing from the couch,  
And often, as she went she turned again  
Back to her chamber, and again she threw  
Herself upon the bed. Her children there  
Clung to their mother’s robes, dissolved in grief,

And she, embracing in her arms, now one  
And then the other, as at point of death,  
Bade them adieu. And all her maidens wept  
Beneath the roof, lamenting her sad lot.  
But she to each extended her right hand,  
And no one was too mean for her to greet  
With parting words, and make to her response.  
Such are the woes within Admetus' house.  
And had *he* died, he would have been no more,  
But shunning that, he meets with such a grief  
As he will ne'er forget.

## CHORUS.

Is not Admetus mourning mid these woes,  
Since it must be that he shall be deprived  
Of such a virtuous wife ?

## WOMAN SERVANT.

He weeps, indeed,  
Holding his dear wife in his arms, and begs  
She will not leave him, vainly asking for  
What cannot be ; for she does fade away  
And waste with sickness, lying all unstrung,  
A burden in his arms ; but still though few  
Her moments, she would look upon the sun,  
As never more, but now for the last time  
She should behold his rays. But I will go  
And intimate your presence, for not all  
Are well affected towards those over them,

So as to stand by them when evil comes.  
But you are ancient well-beloved friends  
Of these our rulers.

## CHORUS I.

Oh, Zeus ! In what way can there be resource  
Amidst our evils, and what end is there  
Of mischief to our lords ?

## CHORUS II.

Will any one  
Come forth, or shall I now cut off my locks  
And throw around me the dark mourning robes ?

## CHORUS III.

'Tis clear, indeed, my friends, 'tis clear, and yet  
Let us pray to the gods, the mighty ones.

## CHORUS IV.

Oh Pæan, king, some remedy find out  
For the sad fortunes of Admetus' house !

## CHORUS V.

Provide it, oh provide, for once before  
Thou didst discover one for him, and now  
Be the deliverer of her from death,  
And silence murderous Hades' stern demands !

*Strophe.*

Woe, woe, alas ! woe, woe, alas, alas !

*Antistrophe.*

Oh son of Pheres, what a deed thou'st done  
Which strips thee of thy wife !

## CHORUS VI.

Is't not, indeed,  
Worthy of self-destruction, and enough  
To cause thee bring thy neck within a noose  
Hung from aloft?

## CHORUS VII.

Yes, surely, for thou'l see  
Thy wife not merely loved, but most beloved,  
Dying upon this day.

## CHORUS VIII.

Behold, behold !  
She and her husband now are coming forth  
Out of the house.

## CHORUS IX.

Cry out, and make lament,  
O land of Pheræ, for the best of wives  
Fading with sad disease beneath the earth  
For Hades, ruler of the lands below.

## CHORUS.

Ne'er will I say that marriage gives more joy  
Than grief, concluding so from former signs,  
And from this wretched fortune of our king  
Who, losing on this day the best of wives,  
Shall live a life not worth the living then.

## ALCESTIS.

O sun, and light of day, and fleeting clouds  
Of heaven !

## ADMETUS.

They look upon both thee and me,  
Two souls in evil case, who nought have done  
Against the gods for which they ought to die.

## ALCESTIS.

O land, and palace roofs, and bridal bed,  
Where once I dwelt in Iolcos !

## ADMETUS.

Raise thyself  
Unhappy one, oh leave me not, and pray  
The mighty gods above to pity us.

## ALCESTIS.

I see the two-oared boat, and Charon stands,  
Ferryman of the dead, with pole in hand,  
And summons me e'en now. "Why tarriest thou ?  
Speed on, thou stoppest us !" and pressing thus  
He hastens me.

## ADMETUS.

Ah me ! for me thou tak'st  
This bitter voyage, O ill-fated one !  
What we do suffer !

## ALCESTIS.

Some one leads me on,  
Leads me (O seest thou not ?) to the abodes  
Where throng the dead, winged Hades darting forth  
Glances from 'neath his eyebrows dark as night.

What doest thou? Let me go! Oh, what a way  
Is that which I, most wretched one, must go!

## ADMETUS.

A sad one for thy friends, but most of all  
For me and for our children, for with them  
I have a common grief.

## ALCESTIS.

Oh, let me go!

Let me go now! No strength is in my feet.  
Let me lie down, for death is near, and o'er  
My eyes creeps dusky night; my children dear,  
My children, ye are henceforth motherless;  
May ye fare well, and look upon the light.

## ADMETUS.

Ah me! I hear these words more sad to me  
Than any death. O do not have the heart,  
I pray thee by the gods, to go from me,  
And by our children whom thou'l leave behind  
Orphans, but bear up still! For when thou'rt dead  
'Twill be all o'er with me, for we in thee  
Both live and do not live; so much do we  
Value thy tender love.

## ALCESTIS.

Admetus, how

Things are with me, thou seest; I wish to say  
Some words that burden me before I die.

I, honouring thee, and thinking it was meet  
To give my life that thou may'st see the light,  
Die ;—though 'twas in my power not to die  
For thee, but have for husband him I would  
Among Thessalians, and to rule a house  
Honoured wlth regal power, but not e'en so  
Would I live with my children, torn from thee.  
Nor did I spare myself, though having gifts  
Of youth in which I ever took delight ;  
And yet he who begat, and she who bare thee  
Forsook thee, though they'd reached the term of life  
When death comes well, and well it would have been  
To save their son, and die a glorious death.  
Thou wast their only son, nor had they hope  
When thou wast gone to have another child.  
And I should have lived on, and thou thyself  
The common term of life, and thou wouldest not  
Have mourned thy deprivation of thy wife,  
And childrens' orphanage. Be sure some god  
Hath wrought this, and is bringing it to pass.  
Well, be it so ! Think thou on me for this  
With gratitude, for never shall I ask  
Their real worth from thee, for there is nought  
More precious than one's life ; but what is just,  
(As thou'l't admit) I ask, for thou dost love  
These children as I love them, and no less,  
If thou dost think aright. Make them the lords

Over my house, and go not thou and wed,  
Bringing a stepmother to trouble them ;  
A woman my inferior, who in spite  
Will lay a heavy load on those whom thou  
And I gave birth to. Do not this indeed,  
I beg of thee, for she who takes the place  
Of former wife, is to her children nought  
More gentle than a viper. He, the boy  
Has in his father a great tower of strength,  
And may hold converse with him in his need ;  
But thou, my daughter, how wilt thou pass through  
Thy maidenhood with honour, finding such  
A yoke-mate to thy father ? 'Tis my fear  
She'll throw some base aspersion on thy name,  
And mar thy marriage in the prime of youth.  
For never will thy mother give thee out  
In marriage, nor encourage thee, my child,  
When in the throes of childbirth, at thy side,  
Where nothing comforts more than mother's love.  
I needs must die, and not to morrow comes  
This evil, nor the third day of the month,  
But straightway I'll be numbered among those  
Who are no more. Farewell, may ye enjoy  
Prosperity, and you may make the boast,  
My husband, that thou had'st the best of wives,  
And you, my children, that you had your birth  
From a good mother.

## CHORUS.

Fear not, for I dare  
To vouch for him he'll do as thou dost say  
If he be left with ordinary sense.

## ADMETUS

It shall be so, fear not, for I enjoyed  
Thee living, and when dead, thou only shalt  
Be called my wife, and no Thessalian maid  
Shall claim me husband in the place of thee.  
No woman comes of such a high-born sire,  
Nor rivals thee in comeliness of form.  
I pray the gods that from my children dear  
Much joy may be in store, for soon from thee  
We have no more, and I shall mourn for thee  
Not for a year alone, but long as life  
Shall last, my wife, with loathing in my heart  
For her who bore me, hating, too, my sire.  
For they in words were friendly, not in deeds.  
But thou hast saved me, giving for my life  
All that was dearest to thee. Have I not  
Great cause for grief in losing such a mate?  
But I will put a stop to revellers  
And groups of banqueters, and wreaths and song,  
Which used to fill my house. For never more  
Will I put hand to lyre, or stir my soul  
To sing to Lybian lute, for thou hast ta'en  
All my delight in life ; but thy loved form,

Fashioned by skilful artists, shall be stretched  
Upon our bed, and I will fall on it,  
Clasping it in my arms, and calling it  
By thy loved name, shall think I have a wife  
In my embrace, although I have her not.  
Cold comfort surely, yet I think 'twill lift  
Some weight from off my soul. And coming oft  
To see me in my dreams, thou'l give me joy ;  
For sweet is it to see e'en in the night  
The friend we love as long as he remains.  
But if the tongue of Orpheus had been mine,  
And song, so that appeasing with my strains  
Demeter's daughter or her husband, I  
Might rescue thee from Hades, I would go  
Beneath, and not dark Pluto's dog, nor yet  
Charon, the ferryman of souls, who sits  
With oar in hand, would check my ardent course,  
Before I would bring back thy life to light.  
But if it can't be so, expect me there  
When I shall die, and an abode provide  
As if to live with me ; for I will bid  
Them place me by thee in the same sad home  
Of cedar-wood, and lay me by thy side ;  
For not when dead e'en will I bear to be  
Apart from thee my only faithful one.

## CHORUS.

And surely I will share with thee thy grief  
As friend with friend, for great is her desert.

## ALCESTIS.

O children, ye yourselves have heard the vow  
Your father's made, that he will never take  
Another wife to lord it over you,  
Nor to dishonour me.

## ADMETUS.

And now indeed,  
I promise, and will keep all that I've said.

## ALCESTIS.

Then receive thou my children from my hand.

## ADMETUS.

I take them, a dear gift from a loved hand.

## ALCESTIS.

Now, to my children fill a mother's part.

## ADMETUS.

Yes, for there's need when they are stripped of thee.

## ALCESTIS.

My children, when 'twas meet that I should live,  
I go beneath the earth.

## ADMETUS.

What shall I do,  
Alas, bereft of thee?

## ALCESTIS.

But time will heal ;  
He who is dead is nothing.

ADMETUS.

By the gods,  
Take me below, O take me !

ALCESTIS.

We suffice  
Who die for thee.

ADMETUS.

O doom, of what a mate  
Thou dost deprive me !

ALCESTIS.

And my eye, in truth,  
Darkness makes heavy.

ADMETUS.

I am all undone,  
My wife, if thou wilt leave me.

ALCESTIS.

Thou may'st speak  
Of me as being no more anything.

ADMETUS.

Lift up thy countenance, O do not leave  
Thy children.

ALCESTIS.

Most unwillingly forsooth,  
But farewell, O my children.

ADMETUS.

Look on them,  
O look !

ALCESTIS.

I am no longer anything.

ADMETUS.

What has come o'er thee? Art thou leaving us?

ALCESTIS.

Farewell.

ADMETUS.

I am undone, O wretched me!

CHORUS.

She's gone, Admetus' wife no longer is.

EUMELUS.

Woe's me, my mother hath gone down below  
In truth, my father, and no longer lives  
Beneath the sun, and wretched, leaving me,  
Hath orphanized my life, for see, O see  
Her eyelid, and her arms stretched by her side!  
Hear me, my mother, hear me I beseech,  
I call upon thee, mother, now I call,  
Falling upon thy lips, thine only son.

ADMETUS.

Thou call'st on one who neither hears nor sees,  
So I and you are struck down to the earth  
With a most heavy stroke.

EUMELUS.

I, in my youth,  
O father, am deserted and bereft

Of my dear mother, I, who have endured  
Most cruel wrongs, and thou, too, sister mine,  
Thou, too, hast suffered with me. Father, thou  
In vain, in vain hast married, nor hast reached  
Old age along with her ; for she has gone  
Before thee, and the house bereft of her  
Is gone to ruin.

#### CHORUS.

These calamities,  
Admetus, thou must bear, thou'rt not the first  
Or last of mortals who has lost a wife  
Famed for her virtue, but remember that  
The debt of dying must be paid by all.

#### ADMETUS.

I know it, and not suddenly this ill  
Has fallen on me, knowing it some time,  
It has much worn me ; but enough of this ;  
I will perform the burial of my dead,  
And do ye stay with me and chant again  
Responsively the pæan to the god  
Implacable below. And I will bid  
All the Thessalians o'er whom I rule  
To share my grief for her with severed hair,  
And mourning robes of black ; and ye who yoke  
To four-horse chariots the single steed,  
Cut with your steel the adorning of their necks.

And in the city let there be no sound  
Of lute or lyre till twelve returning moons  
Have run their course ; for no one shall I lay  
In the cold tomb more dear to me, or more  
Deserving. She is worthy of my most  
Exalted estimation, for alone  
She dared to die for me.

## CHORUS.

O Pelias' child,  
Mayst thou, not faring badly, occupy  
Thy sunless house in Hades' dark abode !  
And let the black-haired god who rules below,  
Know, and the ancient man with hand on oar,  
Ferryman of the dead, he has conveyed  
Far, far the noblest woman o'er the lake  
Of Acheron in his two oarèd boat.  
Often shall minstrels sing of thee upon  
The seven-stringed mountain lyre, and hymn thy praise  
Without the lyre in Sparta, when the time  
Of the Carnean month comes circling round,  
And the moon, high in heaven, shines all night through,  
In bright and happy Athens : such a theme  
For song thou'st, dying, left for minstrelsy.  
Would it were with me, and I had the power  
To bring thee to the light from Hades' halls,  
And dark Cocytus' streams, with help of oar,  
That plies the waters of the realm below.

For thou alone, O best of woman-kind,  
Hast dared to save thy husband from the land  
Of Hades, giving in exchange thy life.  
May the earth, lady, lightly fall on thee,  
And if thy husband some new bed should choose,  
Assuredly shall he be odious  
To me, and to thy children. For when she  
Thy mother would not hide her form beneath  
The ground, nor yet thy venerable sire,  
Who gave thee to the light, and did not dare,  
Obdurate ones, to save their wretched son,  
Although their locks were hoary, thou in bloom  
Of youth hast gone to give thy life for his.  
O may it be my lot myself to win  
Such a dear wedded wife, for chance like this  
Is rare in life, for she would live with me  
On to life's end, and give no cause for pain.

## HERACLES.

Strangers, who in this land of Pheræ dwell,  
Say, shall I find Admetus in the house?

## CHORUS.

The son of Pheres is within the house,  
O Heracles, but say what business brings  
Thee to the land of Thessaly and this  
Pheræan city.

## HERACLES.

For Eurystheus, he  
Who dwells in Tiryns, I have work to do.

CHORUS.

And whither goest thou? What roaming quest  
Hast thou been yoked to?

HERACLES.

I go forth to seek  
The four-horsed car of Thracian Diomede.

CHORUS.

How then wilt thou be able? Hast thou no  
Experience with the stranger?

HERACLES.

None at all,  
I've not yet come to the Bistonian land.

CHORUS.

Thou wilt not get possession of the steeds  
Without a fight.

HERACLES.

But neither can I shirk  
These labours.

CHORUS.

Slaying him thou'l come away  
Again, or being slain, thou'l there remain.

HERACLES.

It will not be the first race that I've run.

CHORUS.

But mastering their lord, what wilt thou gain?

HERACLES.

I shall bear off the steeds for him who rules  
In Tiryns.

CHORUS.

It will be no easy task  
To bridle them.

HERACLES.

Yes, if they breathe not fire  
Out of their nostrils.

CHORUS.

But they worry men  
With ravenous jaws.

HERACLES.

Thou speak'st as if they ate  
The food of wild beasts, not what horses eat.

CHORUS

Yet thou wilt see their mangers foul with blood.

HERACLES.

But of what sire does he who bred them boast  
Himself the son?

CHORUS.

Of Ares ; him who owns  
The golden Thracian target.

HERACLES.

And in this  
Thou mentionest a toil of my hard lot,  
For it is ever harsh and uphill work

If I must meet in fight the sons begot  
By Ares, first of all with Lycaon,  
And then again with Cycnus, and now last  
I come to this third struggle with the steeds,  
And with their lord ; but no one e'er shall see  
The offspring of Alcmene trembling stand  
Before his foes.

## CHORUS.

And here, indeed, comes forth  
Admetus, this land's ruler, from the house.

## ADMETUS.

Hail to thee, son of Zeus, of Perseus' blood !

## HERACLES.

Hail to *thee*, too, Admetus, who art lord  
Of Thessaly !

## ADMETUS.

I would that it *were* well  
With me, but I do know thy friendliness.

## HERACLES.

What cause is it that makes thee singular  
With hair all shorn for grief ?

## ADMETUS.

It is my work  
This day to bury one who is no more.

## HERACLES.

May this affliction not have lighted on  
Thy children !

ADMETUS.

Those whom I begat are now  
Alive within the house.

HERACLES.

Thy sire, indeed,  
Hath reached a ripe old age, if *he* be gone.

ADMETUS.

He too exists, my friend, and she who bare me.

HERACLES.

Surely thy *wife*, Admetus, is not dead !

ADMETUS.

I have a two-fold tale concerning her.

HERACLES.

Speak'st thou of her as dead, or living still ?

ADMETUS.

She *is*, and is *no more*, and hence my grief.

HERACLES.

I am no wiser, for thou speak'st not plain.

ADMETUS.

Know'st thou not her sad fate which must befall ?

HERACLES.

I know she gave her life instead of thine.

ADMETUS.

How doth she live, then, having promised this ?

HERACLES.

Ah ! weep not for thy wife before the time.

ADMETUS.

One doomed to die is dead, the dead is nought.

HERACLES.

To be, and not to be, two things are deemed.

ADMETUS.

Thy thoughts run this way, Heracles, mine that.

HERACLES.

Why weep'st thou then ? what friend of thine is dead ?

ADMETUS.

A woman ; as I said a while ago.

HERACLES.

A stranger, or some one akin to thee ?

ADMETUS.

A stranger, but connected with my house.

HERACLES.

How has she lost her life, then, in thy house ?

ADMETUS.

Her father dying, here she spent her life  
Of orphanhood.

HERACLES.

Alas ! would we had found  
Thee sorrowing not, Admetus !

ADMETUS.

What, indeed,  
Is thy intent in patching up this speech ?

HERACLES.

I will go to another stranger's hearth.

ADMETUS.

Not so, O prince, let not such ill befall !

HERACLES.

A guest is troublesome to those who mourn.

ADMETUS.

The dead are dead. But go into the house.

HERACLES.

'Tis mean to feast 'mid friends whose grief is full.

ADMETUS.

Guest-rooms there are apart for thee to use.

HERACLES.

Excuse me, and I'll give a thousand thanks.

ADMETUS.

Thou must not leave me for another's hearth ;

( *To a Servant.* )

Lead *thou* the way, and open out the rooms  
That are apart from others in the house,  
And say to those in charge that they set out  
A right abundant table, and close thou  
The doors that part the chambers from the court.  
It ill beseems that guests who feast should hear  
Groaning and lamentation for the dead.

## CHORUS.

What doest thou? with such calamity  
Impending, O Admetus, hast thou heart  
To entertain a guest? Unfeeling man!

## ADMETUS.

But if I'd driven from my house and town  
A stranger who had come, wouldest thou the more  
Have praised me? No indeed, for none the less  
Would be my cause of woe, and I should be  
More void of hospitality; besides,  
To my misfortunes I should add this one,  
To have my house called "no house for a guest."  
And I myself have ever found this man  
A liberal entertainer when I've gone  
To his abode in Argos' thirsty land.

## CHORUS.

How then hast thou concealed thy present case  
When comes a man, thy friend, as thou thyself  
Dost say?

## ADMETUS.

He never would have come within  
My house if he had known the loss I've had.  
And I suspect in doing this, I seem  
To him unwise, nor will he give me praise,  
But my halls know not how to thrust away  
Or cast dishonour on a stranger guest.

## CHORUS.

O bountiful and hospitable house !  
Thee did Apollo, minstrel of the lyre,  
Deign to inhabit, and in thy abode,  
He bore to be a feeder of the flocks,  
Piping to them his shepherd songs athwart  
The mountain slopes. To hear his pleasing strains  
The spotted lynxes mingled with the flocks,  
And blood-stained troops of lions left the dells  
Of Othrys, and there danced around the lyre  
The dappled fawn, O Phœbus, bounding on  
With nimble foot beyond the lofty pines,  
Delighting in thy song. So this man dwells  
In flock-abounding home beside the lake  
Of Bœbe's crystal waters, and he makes  
The sky of the Molossians the bound  
Of his ploughed acres and his stretching fields  
Beside the dusky stable of the sun.  
And Pelion owns his sway far as the shore  
Washed by Ægæan waves, all harbourless.  
And now with open doors will he receive  
His guest with dewy eyes, fresh from his grief,  
Over the body of his much-loved wife,  
Just dead within the house. For noble souls  
Have nicety of feeling ; and the good  
Abound in wisdom ; and my mind is filled  
With confidence that he who gives the gods  
Due reverence will prosper in his ways.

## ADMETUS.

Ye men of Pheræ, kindly present here,  
Already do my people bear on high  
My dead for burial, and the funeral pyre,  
With all attendant rites ; but do ye, friends,  
As is the custom, utter parting words  
As lifeless she goes forth to come no more  
Back to her home.

## CHORUS.

And now, in truth, I see  
Thy father coming on with aged foot,  
And with him servants bearing in their hands  
A rich robe for thy wife, a grateful gift  
To those who go below.

## PHERES.

I come, my son,  
To suffer with thee in thy wretched lot ;  
For thou hast lost, and no one will gainsay,  
A noble wife of chaste and prudent heart.  
But these things must be borne, hard though it be  
To bear them ; and accept this burial robe  
And let it go below. "Tis meet the corpse  
Of her who gave her life instead of thine,  
My son, should have all honour, and me, too,  
She's saved from childlessness, nor suffered me  
Bereft of thee to waste away in grief  
The remnant of my age, and having dared

A noble deed, hath made of woman's life  
A thing for all her sex to glory in.  
Thou who hast saved the life of this my son,  
And raised us fallen ones, O, fare-thee-well,  
And mayst thou prosper in the dark abodes  
Of Hades. I affirm such marriages  
Are for man's profit, else 'twere vain to wed.

## ADMETUS.

Thou com'st not to this burial called by me,  
Nor do I count thee 'mong my kindly friends ;  
And ne'er shall she be shrouded in thy robe,  
For in her burial nought of thine she needs.  
Then was thy time for sympathy when I  
Was doomed to perish, but thou stoodst aloof,  
And, being aged, let another die,  
A young man. Wilt thou now this corpse bewail ?  
Thou wast not in reality my sire,  
And she who says she bore me, and is called  
My mother, bare me not, but secretly  
From a slave's blood I at her breast was placed.  
Put to the test, thou showest what thou art,  
And I disclaim that I was born thy son.  
Thou dost, indeed, surpass in cowardice,  
Who, having come to such a stage of life,  
So near its term, refusest, nor dost dare  
To die to save thy son, but meanly left  
For death this stranger woman, whom alone  
I justly deem my mother and my sire.

And yet such courage would have honoured thee  
Dying to save thy son, and short for thee  
Is the remainder of thy time on earth ;  
And I and she would have lived out our lives,  
Nor should I, desolate; lament my loss.  
But what, indeed, a happy man enjoys,  
That has been thine, with kingly power thy youth  
Was graced, and I thy son, was given to thee,  
Heir to this house, that so thou should'st not leave  
(Dying without a child), thy house a prey  
To stranger ravages. Thou wilt not say  
Forsooth, that *I* abandoned thee to die,  
Dishonouring thy age ; I, who towards thee  
Was most of all respectful, and for this,  
Thou and the dame who bare me, gave such thanks.  
Therefore thou canst not too soon set about  
Begetting children, who will nurse thy age  
And deck thee in thy death, and lay thee out ;  
For with these hands I ne'er will bury thee.  
Towards thee, indeed, I am already dead,  
And if (some other offering his life),  
I still behold the light, I'll say of such  
I am his child, and loving cherisher  
Of his old age. "Tis not with honesty  
That old men pray to die, and chide old age  
And a long term of life, for if death comes  
And faces them, not one would wish to die,  
And age to them is burdensome no more.

## CHORUS.

Cease, for sufficient is the present ill,  
My son, nor seek to stir thy father's soul  
To gusts of passion.

## PHERES.

Whom presumest thou,  
My son, to chase away with evil words ?  
Is it some Lydian or some Phrygian slave  
Whom thou hast bought with money? Know'st thou not  
I am Thessalian, of Thessalian sire,  
Legitimately free? Thy insolence  
Goes beyond bounds, and pelting me with words  
Of youthful folly, thou shalt not escape,  
Now thou hast done it. I begat thee heir  
To my estate, and nourished thee, and yet  
I do not own a debt to die for thee ;  
For 'tis no debt by fathers handed down,  
Nor owned by Greeks, that fathers for their sons  
Should give their lives. Thou for thyself wast born,  
Whether unfortunate or fortunate,  
And what was fitting thou hast had from me.  
Thou rulest over much, and I will leave  
To thee my ample many-acred fields ;  
For these descended to me from my sire.  
In what then have I wronged thee? Or of what  
Shall I deprive thee? Die thou not for me,  
Nor I for thee; thou lov'st the light of day,

And deems't thou not thy father loves it too?  
Surely I count the time beneath the earth  
Endures for aye, and life above is short,  
But yet 'tis sweet. Thou, then, most shamelessly  
Strove *not* to die, and livest, and outstripp'st  
Thy destiny, and gavest her to death.  
Talkest thou then, of my unmanliness,  
Thou meanest of mankind? who art outdone  
By woman's daring who has died for thee,  
Thou fine young man. And shrewdly hast thou found  
A way to never die, if thou canst win  
Wife after wife to die instead of thee.  
And dost thou then, upbraid thy friends that they  
Decline to do this, being base thyself?  
Be silent, and remember, if *thou* lov'st  
Thy own life, that each man's is dear to *him*.  
But if thou speak'st reproachfully of me,  
Thou shalt hear much that's evil of thyself,  
And that not false.

## CHORUS.

Both now and hitherto  
Too many hard words have been bandied here;  
But cease, old man, reviling this thy son.

## ADMETUS.

Speak, seeing I have spoken, but to hear  
The truth, if that doth grieve thee, 'twas not wise  
To sin against me.

PHERES.

Had I died for thee  
I should have erred yet more.

ADMETUS.

Is it the same  
For a young man, and for the old to die?

PHERES.

Our business is to live one life, not two.

ADMETUS.

Thou wouldest, forsooth, have longer life than Zeus.

PHERES.

Dost thou then, curse thy parents, nought unjust  
Enduring from them?

ADMETUS.

No, but I perceived  
That a long life was dear to thee.

PHERES.

But say,  
Art thou not bearing this one to the tomb  
Instead of *thee*?

ADMETUS.

A proof, O basest man,  
Of thy faint-heartedness.

PHERES.

"Twas not by me  
She perished. *That* thou wilt not dare to say.

ADMETUS.

Ah ! would that some day thou may'st come to feel  
Thy need of me !

PHERES.

Go, many women woo,  
That more may die for thee.

ADMETUS.

That is to thee  
A cause for shame who would not die for me.

PHERES.

This light of heaven is dear to me, is dear.

ADMETUS.

Thy soul's a coward's, not of manly mould.

PHERES.

Thou canst not chuckle, carrying to the tomb  
*My* aged corpse.

ADMETUS.

Thy death, when it shall come,  
Will be inglorious.

PHERES.

When I'm dead and gone,  
Words of reproach will be of small account.

ADMETUS.

Alas ! how age is full of shamelessness !

PHERES.

She was not shameless, yet devoid of sense  
Thou found'st her.

ADMETUS.

Go thy way, and suffer me  
To bear my dead for burial.

PHERES.

I will go,  
And thou, her murderer, wilt bury her,  
But thou shalt yet to those akin to her  
Give satisfaction due. Acastus, sure,  
No longer lives if he shall fail to take  
Vengeance upon thee for his sister's blood.

ADMETUS.

A plague on thee and her who lives with thee !  
May ye grow old all childless, as is meet,  
(Your son yet living) ! For ye shall not come  
To this same roof that shelters me, at least.  
And if it had been needful to disclaim  
With voice of heralds the paternal hearth,  
I would have done it. But now, let us go,  
(For the sore ill before us must be borne),  
And lay the corpse upon the funeral pyre.

CHORUS.

Alas, Alas ! unflinching one ! stout heart !  
O noble soul, and brave beyond thy sex !  
Farewell ! may Hermes in his place beneath,  
And Hades welcome thee with kindness !  
And if with them 'tis better for the good,  
Mayst thou be bless'd, and take thy seat beside  
The bride of Hades !

## ATTENDANT.

Many have I known  
Hitherto, coming out of every land  
Guests to Admetus' house, for whom I've spread  
An ample board, but never at this hearth  
Have I received a baser one than this,  
Who, seeing first my master full of grief,  
Presumed to pass the gates and enter in.  
And then he did not modestly accept  
The entertainment, (having learnt our ills),  
But if we did not bring the things he loved,  
He called for them ; and taking in his hands  
An ivy goblet, a huge draught he gulped  
Of the dark mother's undiluted juice,  
Until (the flame of wine pervading him),  
He felt its warmth, and crowned his head with boughs  
Stripped from the myrtle, and discordantly  
He howled, and you might hear two different strains ;  
For he was holding forth, regardless quite  
Of all the suffering in Admetus' house,  
And we, her servants, wept with heavy hearts  
Our mistress gone, but no one showed our guest  
Her dewy eyes against Admetus' will.  
And now I'm feasting in the house a guest,  
Some reckless thief or robber, and she's gone  
Forth from the house, and I've not followed her,  
Nor stretched to her my hand with loud lament

For our loved mistress, who to me and all  
Her household ever filled a mother's part.  
For she preserved us from a thousand blames,  
Softening the angry temper of her spouse.  
Do I not then, with justice hate this guest,  
Coming amongst us in our grievous case?

## HERACLES.

Ho, there ! why hast thou such a solemn look ?  
It ill befits a servant to display  
Moroseness towards a guest, but with a look  
Of welcome should he ever be received.  
But thou, when comes a comrade of thy lord,  
Receivest him with face o'erspread with gloom,  
And knitted brows, and making much ado  
About a loss that no way touches thee.  
Come hither, and thou shalt the wiser be.  
Know'st thou the turn that mortal things do take ?  
I think not,—for how shouldst thou ? But attend,  
Death is a debt which every man doth owe,  
And none there is who knows if he shall live  
All through the coming day; for 'tis not clear  
Whither the course of fortune will proceed,  
Nor is it to be taught, or found by art.  
Hearing this, then, and learning it from me,  
Gladden thyself and drink, and day by day  
Reckon thy life thy own, and all the rest  
At fortune's beck, and honour her the most,

Cypris, the pleasantest of gods to men ;  
(For gracious is the goddess), and these things  
Leave, and believe my words, if I do seem  
To speak aright ;—I think so, certainly.  
Wilt thou not, then, dismiss thy too great grief,  
And drink with us, advancing through these gates  
Crowned with thick garlands ? and I know right well  
The plashing of the wine upon the cup  
Will chase away thy sullenness of mind.  
But it is fitting mortal men should dwell  
On mortal things, since life to men of gloom  
And knitted brows is not in truth a life,  
But a calamity, if I'm a judge.

## ATTENDANT.

We know all this, but now we have in hand  
A work that fits not in with revelling  
And laughter.

## HERACLES.

She's a stranger who is dead,  
Don't mourn too much, for they who rule this house  
Are living.

## ATTENDANT.

What, are living ? know'st thou not  
The ill fortune of this house ?

## HERACLES.

Yes, I do know,  
Unless thy master's somehow led me wrong.

ATTENDANT.

His failing is to love too much his guest.

HERACLES.

Ought I not to have found fair treatment here,  
The dead being but a stranger?

ATTENDANT.

A stranger was she truly !

Very much

HERACLES.

Was there, then,  
Some mishap with him that he told not of ?

ATTENDANT.

Go thou and prosper ! Our concern is with  
Our lord's misfortunes.

HERACLES.

This discourse speaks not  
Of outside sufferings.

ATTENDANT.

No ! for then to see  
Thee revelling had not grieved me.

HERACLES.

Can it be  
That I have got injustice from my host ?

ATTENDANT.

Thou cankest when it was no fitting time  
To lodge thee in the house, for we do mourn.  
Thou seëst our shorn locks and cloaks of black.

HERACLES.

Who is it that is dead? A child of his,  
Or has his aged father gone away?

ATTENDANT

Admetus' wife, O stranger, then is dead.

HERACLES.

What say'st thou? Did ye, then, in spite of this,  
Receive me as a guest?

ATTENDANT.

He thought it shame

To send thee from his house.

HERACLES.

O ill-starred man!

How excellent a partner hast thou lost!

ATTENDANT,

We all have suffered loss, not he alone.

HERACLES.

I knew it when I saw his streaming eyes,  
Shorn locks, and dismal face, but I was made  
To think that he was bearing to the tomb  
The corpse of one not near of kin to him.  
And passing through these gates against my will  
I drank in this man's hospitable house,  
And he in such a case. And did I dare  
To revel, wearing garlands on my head?

But yet the fault was thine, who told me not  
That such misfortune pressed upon this house.  
But where will be her burial? How shall I  
Go forth to find him?

ATTENDANT.

By the public path  
That leads straight to Larissa, thou shalt see  
A polished tomb, beyond the city's bounds.

HERACLES.

O much enduring heart and soul of mine,  
Now show what kind of son Alcmene bore  
To Zeus (of Tiryns she, Electryon's child),  
For I must save this lady lately dead,  
And bring again Alcestis to this house,  
And send much joy into Admetus' heart.  
And going, I will seek this black-robed king  
Who rules the dead, this Thanatos, and him  
I hope to find no long way from the tomb  
Quaffing the sacred blood; and if I rush  
Out of my ambush and get hold of him,  
And clasp him in my arms, there is no one  
Shall take him from me, though he labour sore  
Before he gives the woman up to me.  
But if I miss my prize, he coming not  
Near to the clotted blood, I then will go  
Down to the sunless dwellings of the bride

And of her lord, and make demand for her.  
And I have confidence that I shall bring  
Alcestis up, and place her in the arms  
Of him who took me in, nor sent me off,  
Though bowed beneath misfortune's heavy stroke.  
But he concealed it in his nobleness,  
Out of respect for me. Of those who dwell  
In Thessaly, what man does more regard  
The stranger guest? What dweller in the land  
Of Hellas? Therefore shall it not be said,  
He did a kindness to a mean-souled man,  
Himself of noble blood.

## ADMETUS.

Alas, alas!

O hateful funeral train! O hateful sight  
Of widowed chambers! Ah, woe, woe is me!  
To what place shall I go? Where stand? What say?  
And what not say? O would that I were dead!  
Surely, 'twas for a heavy destiny  
My mother gave me birth. I envy those  
Who've gone below; I love them, and I long  
To occupy their dwellings. I joy not  
To see the light, or tread upon the earth,  
Stripped of so sweet a helpmate, whom grim Death  
Hath rendered up to Hades.

## CHORUS.

On, step on,

And go to the concealment of thy house.

ADMETUS.

Woe, woe !

CHORUS.

Things worthy of such cries of woe  
Have been thy portion.

ADMETUS.

Ah !

CHORUS.

Most grievous pain  
Hast thou gone through, and that I know right well.

ADMETUS.

Alas, alas !

CHORUS.

But that doth profit not  
Her that's beneath.

ADMETUS.

Ah me !

CHORUS.

No more to gaze  
On thy loved wife and see her face to face,  
Is grief indeed.

ADMETUS.

Thou bringest to my mind  
What wounds me sore, for what worse ill can be  
Than to be parted from a loving wife ?  
Would I had never married her, nor dwelt  
Together with her in this house of mine.  
I envy the unmarried among men,  
And those who have no children ; for their life

Is single, and to grieve for it alone  
Is but a moderate burden. But to see  
Diseases in one's children, and the bed  
Graced by a happy bride laid waste in death,  
Is not to be endured, when one may be  
Childless, and never take the marriage vow.

## CHORUS.

Fate, fate, that's hard to struggle with, is come.

## ADMETUS.

Woe, woe !

## CHORUS.

Thou putt'st no limit to thy grief.

## ADMETUS.

Ah, ah !

## CHORUS.

A weight that's heavy to be borne,  
But yet—

## ADMETUS.

Alas, alas !

## CHORUS.

Endure thou it,

Thou'rt not the first who's lost—

## ADMETUS.

Ah me, ah me !

## CHORUS.

A wife ; but *this* calamity weighs down  
One mortal, *that* another, when it comes.

## ADMETUS.

O mourning without end, and sorrowing  
For dear ones who have gone beneath the earth,  
Why did'st thou hinder me, nor let me throw  
Myself into the still unclosèd tomb,  
And lifeless lie with her who is by far  
The best of women? Hades then had had  
*Two* truly faithful souls, instead of one,  
Ferried together o'er the lake below.

## CHORUS.

There was a man akin to me, whose son,  
One much to be lamented, died within  
His house, an only child; but yet he bore  
The evil patiently, though he was left  
Without a child, and now far on his way  
To hoary hairs, and to the verge of life.

## ADMETUS.

O semblance of a house, how shall I come?  
Within thy bounds, how can I dwell in thee  
With such a change of fortune? Woe is me!  
For 'tis another thing. Then, then 'twas mine  
To enter it with brands of Pelian pine,  
And bridal songs, supporting the loved hand  
Of my young wife; and after us there came  
A band of revellers with cheerings loud,  
Wishing much joy to her who now lies dead,

And to myself, that, born of gentle blood,  
And both of noble parentage, we came  
And joined together in the marriage bond.  
But now laments instead of bridal hymns,  
And cloaks of black instead of raiment white.  
Escort me to my desert marriage bed.

## CHORUS.

This grief hath lighted on thee all unused  
To evil fortune following happier days,  
But in it thou hast saved thy life and soul ;  
Thy wife has died, and left behind for thee  
A fond remembrance. What is new in this ?  
Death hath already taken many a wife.

## ADMETUS.

Friends, I account the fortune of my wife  
More happy than my own, though it seems not so.  
For pain and grief will never touch her more,  
And with fair fame her many troubles end ;  
But I who have no right to live, who've passed  
My fated time, shall lead a life of pain.  
Just now have I discovered it, for how  
Shall I endure to come within these doors ?  
Whom greeting, and by whom addressed in turn,  
Shall I feel pleasing welcome when I come ?  
O whither shall I turn ? The loneliness  
That reigns within will drive me out again,

Whenever I look on the empty bed,  
Where slept my wife, the seats on which she sat,  
The chamber's squalid floor, and see, (sad sight !)  
My children falling on my knees with wail  
For their lost mother, and the servants all  
Mourning for such a mistress as has gone.  
Such scenes will be within, and out of doors  
The weddings of Thessalians, and the crowd  
Of women in their midst will drive me off.  
For never will I bear to look upon  
The compeers of my wife, and he who is  
My enemy will speak such words as these ;  
“ This is the man who lives but on his shame,  
Who did not dare to die, but gave instead  
Her whom he married, in his cowardice  
Fleeing from Hades, and still does he dare  
To call himself a man ? But he does hate  
His parents, though objecting much himself  
To go below.” Such ill-name shall I have  
Beside my heavy loss ! What profits it,  
My friends, that I should live, then, I who am  
Ill-spoken of, ill-faring every way.

## CHORUS.

I to the muses have applied myself,  
And lofty speculations, and have known  
The reasonings of many learned men,  
But never have I found a thing so strong

As stern necessity, nor ought to cope  
With *it* in Thracian tablets once inscribed  
From voice of Orpheus, nor in remedies  
Which Phœbus gave to Æsculapius' sons,  
Dispensing healing to much-suffering man.  
But of this goddess only, may none come  
And sit before her altar, or her form  
In wood or stone, for no regard has she  
For sacrificial gifts. O may'st thou not,  
Dread goddess, come to me with greater force  
Than in my former life ! For e'en what Zeus  
Assents to, he accomplishes with thee.  
And with thy might thou conquerest the steel  
Found 'mongst the Chalybes, nor is there one  
Can hope to bend thy most relentless will.  
And in her bonds, that are not to be shunned,  
The goddess holds thee fast. Submit thou, then,  
For never wilt thou bring up with thy tears  
Those who have perished, from the realm beneath.  
Even the children of the secret loves  
Of the high gods must die. Most dear was she  
While she was with us, and she is still dear  
Though dead. And thou didst bring unto thy bed  
A wife the noblest of all woman kind.  
Let not her tomb be counted as a mound  
O'er one that's perished, but let her be held  
In honour like the gods, and reverenced  
By every wayfarer. And one will say

Who chances to ascend the sloping path,  
“This lady gave her life in time gone by  
To save from doom her husband. Now is she  
A blessed goddess. Hail, O honoured one,  
Grant that we now may prosper !” Such will be  
The words that greet her. And in truth here comes  
Alcmene’s son, Admetus, to thy hearth  
As it appears.

## HERACLES.

Admetus, it is fit  
To speak with freedom to the man one loves,  
And not, restraining words, to keep reproach  
Within one’s bosom. And I thought it right  
Chancing upon thee in thy wretchedness,  
To prove myself thy friend. But nought said’st thou  
Of thy wife lying dead. But in thy house  
Thou gav’st me entertainment, seemingly  
Busied about a loss that was not thine ;  
And I my head with garlands crowned, and poured  
Libations to the gods within a house  
So full of misery. And I blame, indeed,  
I blame thy treatment, but I would not add  
Ought to thy wretchedness. But let me tell  
Why I have come, returning back again.  
Take thou and tend this woman while I go  
And bring the Thracian horses back with me,  
First slaying him who rules Bistonian men.

But should that happen which I would not have,  
(For strong my hope to prosper), I do give  
This woman to attend thee in thy house ;  
But with much toil she came into my hands.  
For I found some appointing athletes' games,  
Open to all, and worthy the attempt,  
And thence I bring her who was given to me  
A prize for victory ; for 'twas allowed  
To those who conquered in the lesser games  
To bear off horses, and to those who won  
The greater, (wrestlers and the pugilists),  
A prize of cattle, and the woman went  
Along with them, and it was counted base  
For one who won the prize to pass her by,  
So honourably gained. But as I said,  
This woman must needs be a care to thee.  
For not by theft, but with much heavy toil  
She came into my hands, and by-and-by  
Thou, too, perhaps wilt see I have done well.

## ADMETUS.

Not out of disrespect for thee, nor that  
I counted thee an enemy, did I  
Conceal the wretched fortune of my wife.  
But 'twould have been another added grief,  
If thou hadst hurried from my house away  
'To share some other's hospitable board.  
But 'twas enough for me to have to mourn

My own misfortune. I beseech thee, prince,  
'Mong the Thessalians bid some other man  
Who has not gone through sufferings such as mine  
To tend this woman, if it can be so.

And many men of Pheræ are thy friends ;  
O do not make my sufferings live again.

I could not keep from weeping, seeing her  
Within my house. O do not add disease  
To one diseased ; enough am I weighed down  
By my calamity. In what part, too,  
Of this abode of mine should one be lodged  
So young ? For that she's young is plainly shown  
By her adornments and her vesture, too.

Must she, then, occupy a room with men ?  
And how can she unsullied long remain  
So mixed up with young men ? 'Tis hard to check,  
O Heracles, the ardour of young blood.

Thou seest my forethought for thy own behoof.  
Or, must I lodge her in the room of her  
Who's dead ? How can I bring her to the couch  
Where slept Alcestis ? Double blame I dread,  
Both from the people, lest there be who say  
I was untrue to her who saved my life,  
To fall into another girl's embrace ;  
And it behoves me to have much regard  
For her who's gone, and she in truth deserves  
My utmost reverence. But, O lady, know,

Whoe'er thou art, thou hast the very look  
And figure of Alcestis. Woe is me !  
Take, by the gods, this woman from my sight,  
Nor ruin one already sore bestead.  
For seeing her, I seem to see my wife ;  
My heart is troubled, and from out my eyes  
Fountains burst forth. O miserable me !  
How is my cup of bitter sorrow full !

## CHORUS.

I indeed have not much that's good to say  
Of fortune, but 'tis needful to bear well  
What God dispenses, be it what it may.

## HERACLES.

Would that I had the power to bring again  
Thy wife to daylight from the abodes below,  
And gratify thy soul with such a boon !

## ADMETUS.

I know thou hast the will ; but what means this ?  
It is not in the power of the dead  
To come up to the light.

## HERACLES.

Do thou not then  
Go to excess, but bear it as thou should'st.

## ADMETUS.

'Tis easier to advise than to endure  
Our ills with patience.

HERACLES.

But what would'st thou gain  
If thou wert always uttering thy moans?

ADMETUS.

I myself know it, but a longing strange  
To indulge in sorrow takes me past myself.

HERACLES.

It is so, for remembrance of the dead  
Calls forth a tear.

ADMETUS.

She has undone me more  
Than I can tell.

HERACLES.

Thou hast lost indeed a wife  
Most virtuous; who can say she is not so?

ADMETUS.

So that the man before thee shares no more  
The joys of life.

HERACLES.

But time will heal thy grief,  
For now thy ill is still but in its youth.

ADMETUS.

Time thou mayst speak of, if thou mean'st by this  
The time to die.

HERACLES.

A woman, and the wish  
For a new marriage will assuage thy grief.

ADMETUS.

Hold ! what is that thou say'st ? Such thought as that  
Be far from me !

HERACLES.

But why ? For wilt thou not  
Marry again, but rather love the bed  
Of widowed solitude ?

ADMETUS.

There is no one  
Of womankind who shall repose with me.

HERACLES.

Dost thou then think to benefit the dead ?

ADMETUS.

"Tis meet that she be honoured wheresoe'er  
She chance to be.

HERACLES.

True, true, but thou may'st still  
Be charged with folly.

ADMETUS.

Say thou'l never call  
This man a bridegroom.

HERACLES.

I commend thee that  
Thou art a friend most faithful to thy wife.

ADMETUS.

May I die now, if I be false to her  
Though she exists not.

HERACLES.

'Take this woman now  
Into thy noble halls.

ADMETUS.

O ask it not  
By Zeus thy sire, I pray thee.

HERACLES.

Thou wilt err,  
Not doing it.

ADMETUS.

And doing it my heart  
Will be much pained.

HERACLES.

Consent, for soon perchance  
This favour may receive fit recompense.

ADMETUS.

Oh how I wish she ne'er had been thy prize  
Won in the games !

HERACLES.

And yet thou hast a share  
With me in victory.

ADMETUS.

Thou hast spoken fair,  
But let the woman still depart from me.

HERACLES.

She *shall* depart if it is fit, but first  
Think well about it whether it *is* fit.

ADMETUS.

It is fit if thou'l not be angry with me.

HERACLES.

I also, knowing something, wish to have  
*My* way.

ADMETUS.

Then be it so, but what thou doest  
Is no way pleasing to me.

HERACLES.

But some day  
Thou wilt approve my conduct, only yield !

ADMETUS.

Bring her then, if she needs must be received  
Within my house.

HERACLES.

I would not have her left  
With thy attendants.

ADMETUS.

Take her then thyself  
Into my house if it seems good to thee.

HERACLES.

Then will I bring and place her in thy arms.

ADMETUS.

I will not touch her, yet she may be brought  
Into my house.

HERACLES.

I trust in thy right hand  
Alone.

ADMETUS.

Thou forcest me, O prince, to do  
These things against my will.

HERACLES.

Have courage then  
To extend thy hand and touch thy stranger guest.

ADMETUS.

Well then, I stretch it forth as I would touch  
A headless Gorgon.

HERACLES.

Hast thou her?

ADMETUS.

I have.

HERACLES.

Well then, take care of her and thou wilt say  
The son of Zeus has been a noble guest.  
Look on her, see if she in aught is like  
To thy lost wife, and in thy joy forget  
Thy sorrow.

ADMETUS.

O ye gods, what shall I say?  
This is a most unhoped for miracle.  
Do I in truth see in this woman here  
My own loved wife, or does some mocking joy  
Godsent confound my senses?

HERACLES.

'Tis not so,  
But in this woman thou *dost* see thy wife.

ADMETUS.

See that she be no phantasm of the dead.

HERACLES.

He whom thou mad'st thy friend can have no claim  
To be a necromancer.

ADMETUS.

Do I then

Behold my wife whom I so late entombed ?

HERACLES.

Assuredly, and yet I wonder not  
At thy distrust of fortune.

ADMETUS.

May I touch,  
And speak to her as my own living wife ?

HERACLES.

Speak to her, for thou hast thy heart's desire.

ADMETUS.

O eyes and figure of a wife most dear,  
I have thee all unlooked for, for no hope  
Cheered me that I should ever see thee more.

HERACLES.

Thou hast her ; may no envy of the gods  
Light on thee !

ADMETUS.

O thou noble son of Zeus,  
The mightiest, may'st thou prosper in thy way,

And may the father who begat thee, guard  
Thee ever ! For 'tis thou alone hast raised  
My fortunes. How then didst thou send her up,  
From underneath into the light of day ?

HERACLES.

After a fight with him who is the lord  
Of life and death.

ADMETUS.

Where saidst thou, thou didst have  
This wrestling match with death ?

HERACLES.

Beside the tomb,  
Seizing him from an ambush with my hands.

ADMETUS.

But why all speechless stands the woman here ?

HERACLES.

It may not be that thou should'st hear her voice  
Before with offerings to the gods beneath  
She's purified herself, and light from heaven  
Three times hath dawned. But take her now within,  
And being henceforth just, Admetus, give  
Due honour to thy guests. And now farewell !  
I go to do the work set out for me,  
To serve the royal son of Sthenelus.

ADMETUS.

Stay with us, and partake thou of our hearth !

## HERACLES.

Hereafter it shall be, but now I needs  
Must haste away.

## ADMETUS.

Then may'st thou have success,  
And may'st thou come here with returning step !  
And all the citizens will I command,  
And tetrarchs, with the dance to celebrate  
This happy issue, and the temples fill  
With sacrificial prayers. For now our life  
Is changed to better than it was before ;  
And that I'm fortunate I'll not deny.

## CHORUS.

Many and varied are the forms of fate,  
And many things unlooked for do the gods  
Perform, and that which was expected fails  
Fulfilment, but the gods have found a way  
To bring to pass the things that none expect.  
In such a way has this affair turned out.



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